

[Skip to Content](#)

News

Search Cal Poly News

California Polytechnic State University

Hurricane Katrina Relief**Dispatch from Cal Poly Student & Red Cross Volunteer Nick Hoover****SEPT 6 - BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA:**

While many people are horrified by the images and stories coming from the hurricane stricken area of New Orleans, the response of a community once half the size of the big easy is beyond my biggest expectations. Baton Rouge has swelled to a population of nearly 500,000 after thousands of hurricane victims from the gulf coast have arrived here looking for shelter, food, and a warm smile from the American Red Cross.

I am serving as volunteer in the media and public relations department. Our command center is located in what was a vacant Wal Mart building. Within days, disaster relief workers from various backgrounds and locales have set up what takes corporations months. We have logistics, motorpool, information technology, public relations, human resources... basically every department you could imagine, all staffed mostly by unpaid volunteers from around the country.

My flight touched down in Baton Rouge monday afternoon after eight hours of traveling from my house in San Luis Obispo. A 15-minute taxi ride later, I was at the disaster relief operation 865 (greater Louisiana) command center. I went through a brief orientation and check-in, where I was told to watch out for rabid dogs on the prowl after being set loose throughout New Orleans. Later that evening, I teamed up with several other disaster relief workers. We managed to get a van from the motorpool and took it to our assigned shelter: St. Andrews United Methodist Church. Staff shelters can be hit or miss from what I'm told, some are great -- some are just a room with a few cots. I later found out that St. Andrews is the hilton of shelters.

A bowl of white rice, red beans and garlic bread (traditional Louisiana home cooking I'm told) may seem like a quick fix in your kitchen, but I can tell you: these people know how to cook. Maybe it was exhaustion, but I've never tasted anything so simple, yet so good. The church members that whipped up this culinary creation tried to persuade me to throw on some "heat" A.K.A.hot sauce, not a good idea for the light hearted.

I can't speak highly enough of the community members here in Baton Rouge.

When I walked off of the plane, they were there with applause for us Red Crossers. When we arrived at our shelter, food was prepared. When we went to sleep, they were there to make sure each and every one of the 150 staff members had a cot. When we woke up, there were towels and donated supplies ready for us to use before going out in the field along with a breakfast that I don't think could be found back home. This is a community, there's nothing more I can. I hate to be cliché, but words cannot describe the effort that these people put forth in taking care of us here to help.

Today, Tuesday, I've been helping out with the directing the media at the River Center, Baton Rouge's arena for concerts and shows. Currently, 4,320 evacuees are residing here. This facility opened up on August 29th, right as

the hurricane hit the gulf coast. The highest concentration of people here are early evacuees, who made it out before Katrina touched down, and those who rode out the hurricane, but escaped before the levee breaks that flooded New Orleans.

The Red Cross is extremely flexible with placing volunteers in positions where they're needed. They asked me if I'd like to help out by being a photographer, considering my major at Cal Poly and my experience at [The Tribune](#) as a photojournalist. While I do enjoy putting my skills to good use, I've asked to be placed on an ERV, or Emergency Response Vehicle. These vans are driven by volunteers out into hurricane affected areas with food and supplies for residents who otherwise would be helpless. I think my efforts would be better placed there, where I can get on the front lines helping the people of Louisiana. Here at the Red Cross, we don't call them victims: we call them clients.



As evacuees are checked in behind me by the Baton Rouge police department, word of another possible hurricane forming near Florida is being discussed by Red Cross officials above me. The disaster that these storms cause goes far beyond physical destruction. The Red Cross mental and spiritual health workers stand by easing people through the transition from day to day life with a home, to making the best of a hot meal and a cot roughly half the size of a twin bed in a Red Cross shelter.

Earlier today, an elderly gentleman asked me for assistance in finding what he called a "ticket out of here." I tried my best, but with Greyhound Busses out of comission due to computer glitches, no train station nearby, and airfare that's far out of the budget of many of these evacuees... I could only point him to our relocation desk, which coordinates carpooling evacuees to other areas when someone offers a few spaces in their vehicle. The look in his eyes was one that made me want to drive him wherever he had to go, I could tell that finding his way wasn't going to be easy. I escorted him into the check in area, where police scanned him with a metal detector and required him to wash his hands with hand sanitizer, a requirement for all of those entering into the River Center shelter. I sincerely hope he found a ride to where he needed to go, as a "ticket out of here" is a needle in the haystack.

Unfortunately, as a Red Cross photographer: I'm not allowed to photograph the faces of our clients, without a written consent form. Let me tell you, getting someone who just watched their house float away like a paper boat floating down a storm drain isn't an easy task. I've been trying to get mostly the backs of evacuees, with the faces of Red Cross volunteers. It's not an easy task. I'm still working on getting more access with less restrictions. Captions are embedded in these JPEG files.

Today's photographs can be found here: <http://www.nickhoover.com/redcross/day1/>

**Note: Media use is exclusive to the Tribune and Cal Poly's public relations department; TV is out unless it relates to my effort as a Red Cross volunteer and Cal Poly student.*

About Cal Poly Student Nick Hoover

I am a 22 year old Cal Poly Graphic Communication senior from Los Osos, CA.

I also work part time as a photography desk tech/photojournalist at The Tribune. I decided to volunteer with the Red Cross on Thursday, September 1st. I was called into duty on Saturday, Sept. 3 and arrived on Monday, Sept. 6. I will be here for two weeks (until September 19th).

My duties as a volunteer range from media relations, to handing food out to those in need. I'm not doing this for any praise, but simply to help out those can barely help themselves. The reason I'm sending this to multiple media sources, is I want to encourage volunteers to sign up with the Red Cross.

Current needs are roughly 40,000 volunteers over the next three months. Without raising awareness, we will be short handed in a colossal effort to feed, shelter, and rebuild the gulf coast. By documenting my effort as a volunteer -- I hope that I can show people that making the decision to join is not a difficult one. With a few quick training classes, some basic orientation, almost anyone can come help out.

[CP Home](#) • [CP Find It](#) [Get Adobe Reader](#) • [Microsoft Viewers](#)

Events • Recent Releases • Cal Poly Magazine

•

**Cal Poly Update E-newsletter • Contact Public
Affairs • Alumni • Giving • Athletics**

Cal Poly Public Affairs

California Polytechnic State University

San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

805.756.7266

polynews@calpoly.edu